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SPEECH AT OPENING CEREMONY OF THE
TENTH GENERAL CONFERENCE OF ASAIHL AND
SEMINAR ON SCHOLARLY PUBLISHING IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

BY

PROFESSOR UNGKU A. AZIZ
VICE-CHANCELLOR, UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA
PRESIDENT OF ASAIHL

Honourable Minister, Your Excellencies
Members of ASAIHL, Learned Scholars and Publishers of Learned Scholars,
Honoured Guests
Ladies and Gentlemen.

Welcome to the Tenth General Conference of ASAIHL and to the Seminar on Scholarly Publishing in Southeast Asia which will be formally declared open by the Honourable Minister of Education in a short while.

This is indeed a momentous occasion for all of us in ASAIHL. This is our Tenth General Conference. ASAIHL was actually formed at a Conference in January during the period, 16th to 18th, in 1956.

The General Conference meets once every two years and so Ladies and Gentlemen here we are in Kuala Lumpur today marking our Tenth Anniversary. I might say without undue pride that among the many international organizations in this region, in the field of higher education, ASAIHL should be accepted as the eldest surviving active member of the fraternity. (Although it may be the eldest, I should like to think it is also one of the most sprightly.)

Before going further may, I take this opportunity to thank all of you for kindly coming to this Conference and Seminar. I hope you are duly rewarded with fruitful discussions. I should like to thank the Director of INTAN, Dr. Elyas bin Omar, who has so kindly allowed us to use his beautiful facilities for this ceremony. We are unable to use the University halls because our 8,500 students are taking their final examinations there. However, the discussions and other meetings will be held in the conference rooms on the campus.

Many individuals have worked hard to make this occasion a success and we owe all of them a great debt of gratitude. The Honourable Minister of Education, Dr. Mahathir Mohamed Alhaj, has most generously found time to grace the occasion. I am personally much obliged to him for this kindness and my colleagues in ASAIHL join me in thanking him.

I shall not bore you with a detailed report on the activities of ASAIHL during the past two years, except to highlight some of our more significant activities.

I would like to tell you about the Annual ASAIHL Lecture. Each year, ASAIHL receives nominations from its members for the ASAIHL Lectureship. Only those scholars who are considered to have made outstanding contributions within their respective fields of knowledge are put forward by the member Universities of ASAIHL. At the same time, a number of members of ASAIHL offer to provide a suitable venue for the presentation of the ASAIHL Lecture and to act as host on the occasion. The ASAIHL Administrative Board then has the heart-breaking task of selecting one from among the glittering list of candidates. The host is then chosen from a country different from that to which the ASAIHL Lecturer belongs.

Last year ASAIHL was duly recognized by UNESCO as a Non-Governmental Organization with the status of Category B in accordance with the Directives Concerning UNESCO's Relations with International Non-Governmental Organizations and the President represented ASAIHL at the Eighteenth Session of the General Conference held during October/November 1974.

Thus, last year, in September, Professor Emerita S. Quito, Professor of Philosophy of De La Salle College of the Philippines, was the first Southeast Asian scholar to be accorded this signal honour. She delivered her most interesting lecture at the RELC Centre in Singapore. (Copies of her lecture will be available after this ceremony.) Personally, I would say it will be a real challenge for you to spend an evening jousting your wits against this lady philosopher who has won not only Southeast Asian recognition but international acknowledgement.

I have described the ASAIHL Lectureship in some detail because it exemplifies an attempt by one representative body of Southeast Asian scholars to give due recognition to their own academic brothers and sisters. Hitherto, Southeast Asian scholars like the proverbial prophets only seem to have been able to gain recognition outside their own countries, frequently, in the so called Western and Eastern portions of this world. Our peoples and more so, some of our political leaders are only too quick to genuflect before foreign experts. Imported things are often thought to be sweeter. This is so because the bitter truths have been extracted from them. They are attractive simply because they appear to be different. Well, we in ASAIHL, believe that if we are to achieve greater regional solidarity and integrity, especially in the fields of higher education, then one significant way of achieving this is to show more respect and to give more encouragement to our own scholars and to the scholars in our neighbouring countries in the region. Hence we have instituted the ASAIHL Lectureship.

Besides this we have held two seminars on problems of the development of University Curricula as well as non-academic activities such as sports, cultural programmes and public service projects organized by universities. We have found that there is a great diversity of practice within this region. And, since we have also come to the conclusion that these two aspects of university organization should be considered together, to produce an integrated whole-life programme for the university students, we propose to continue discussing this complex of topics in another seminar which is to be held sometime this year.

A third activity I must mention, albeit briefly, is our attempt to fulfil an aspect of Article 2 of our Constitution. That is, to endeavour to foster the exchange of teachers and students among the members of ASAIHL in the furtherance of cultural cooperation and understanding.

The ASAIHL Academic Exchange Scheme provides funds for scholars from member institutions to visit and teach in universities of other countries in the region. Similarly, the ASAIHL Fellowship Scheme provides substantial financial assistance for scholars to make short visits to universities in the Southeast Asian countries provided they visit at least two member institutions of ASAIHL. We are also trying hard to encourage graduate students to do some of their academic work in universities in neighbouring countries in Southeast Asia.

In conclusion, may I say a few words about the seminar on Scholarly Publishing that is being held in conjunction with our Tenth General Conference.

From what I have said you will gather that I am personally somewhat strongly inclined towards the strengthening of the spirit of regionalism amongst the countries of Southeast Asia.

Among the multitude of problems that confront us in Southeast Asia, from the effective elimination of poverty to the massive absorption of modern science and technology, we are faced with the apparently contradictory needs of simultaneously defining and strengthening our national identities, while in a world of big-power games, we are also faced with the imperative

need to foster regional unity and solidarity. How can we resolve this paradox?

Indeed, you may rightly ask, what has a seminar on scholarly publishing to do with the reconciliation of the search for national identity with the impulsion towards regional solidarity?

I shall suggest to you that the *raison d'être* for the seminar itself is the solution to the problem.

If we examine the history of the university as one of the more influential institutions, responsible for the evolution of modern civilization, we will see that the very existence of modern universities would be inconceivable without the plethora of journals and books that constitute the most basic teaching instruments of the university as we know it today.

Indeed, perhaps one reason for the rather troubled state of the university, in some parts of this region, is the lack of journals and books per se and more especially journals and books that are written by national scholars on local topics seen from the regional point of view. It may also be possible that a lack of scholarly journals in our own national languages has inhibited many of our own national scholars from escaping from the mind-bending thought constraints that are imposed on them when they go overseas to supplicate for their higher degrees.

Furthermore, our scholars ought to be properly and adequately respected by their fellow scholars and their students in the Universities, by the Governments and by the masses in their own countries.

Inside this region, we must learn to look at each other with the same quality of esteem and attention that some of us seem to reserve only for scholars and pseudo-scholars who come from outside the region. It appears to me that our people, our scholarly communities and our students cannot really become properly appreciative of our own outstanding scholars unless their researches and their innovative ideas are freely available in journals that circulate widely in the region. It may also be necessary to produce journals that provide translations in the main languages of the region. It is unlikely that our people and our students have satisfactory access to serious journals that are published in America or Europe because of the lack of library facilities and because these publications are becoming increasingly expensive. Off-prints which are also becoming more costly often have to be circulated among extra-regional scholars.

What then is there for the people of the region to read? If we have our own journals on Biology, on Mathematics or on Anthropology, then we will have better forums for our scholars to appear in. There is no reason why such journals could not also be circulated internationally. Perhaps, then even the foreign scholars will deign to write for our journals and thereby reverse the present trend of academic neo-imperialism.

Since many of the universities in this region, like universities elsewhere, abide by the principle, "publish or perish" when they are considering appointments and promotions, some of our scholars tend to become rather panic stricken in their frustrated endeavours to find outlets for their academic papers. Most of the present outlets are located outside Southeast Asia. Queues of authors are long and the inclination by editors to favour authors from their own institutions or who are fellow nationals is understandable although it may be unfair. The ultimate stage of this inequitable form of academic neo-imperialism is reached when the poor scholar in the developing country, or relatively speaking, his even poorer University, is expected to subsidize the publication of the big-name journal that is published in one of the advanced countries!

Thus I am suggesting that we proceed to establish our own regional journals. From a technical point of view we can produce academic journals of a quality equal to anything that can

be printed in Japan, America, Europe or the Socialist countries. In so far as content is concerned, given the right encouragement, I am confident that articles and books of nonpareil academic quality can be found in abundance.

Our main problem arises from the second aspect of the paradox. Each country in Southeast Asia must understand that in this concept regional cooperation should take precedence over national ambition. No single country can ever hope to provide a wide series of academic journals covering many specialised fields of knowledge. Therefore, we should try to achieve an academic division of labour. We should try to foster a greater spirit of academic cooperation. Not only should each of us be prepared to undertake to publish certain academic journals and to refrain from trying to publish others but we should also undertake to try our best to encourage our respective academics to support the designated journals that are published by our neighbours. In this way, we can lay the foundations, at least in the academic world, for enhanced consciousness of national identity while we simultaneously strengthen the bonds of regional solidarity.

Specifically, ASAIHL can implement several positive contributions. Its seminar brings together university publishers, editors and administrators, so that they can discuss their major problems and make concrete proposals. This is a necessary launching phase. ASAIHL can encourage the emergence of regionally oriented specialised journals by offering financial and other inducements to the several Southeast Asian learned societies that it has fostered the birth of - such as the Southeast Asian Social Science Association and the Southeast Asian Mathematical Society. (And very likely, by the middle of this year the Southeast Asian Agricultural Economics Society.) ASAIHL can help to find funds at least for seeding the cost of launching scholarly journals that would be published as multilateral undertakings between a cluster of universities in the region.

One might conclude by saying that in the garden of ASAIHL there shall grow many trees of learned societies and some of their fruits shall be in the form of scholarly journals.

I humbly realize that many obstacles and objections will confront my proposals. If I appear somewhat of a visionary in my rather optimistic view of the need for greater regional unity and cooperation in this last quarter of our century, my excuse is merely to say to you that I am offering a sincere invitation to you to look through one small peephole and see what could be accomplished in scholarly publishing in the region of Southeast Asia and to note the slender contribution that ASAIHL might make towards the accomplishment of this ideal.

I now have great pleasure in inviting the Honourable Minister of Education, who has waited so patiently, to address us and to declare open this Tenth General Conference of ASAIHL and the Seminar on Scholarly Publishing in Southeast Asia.

Thank you.